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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Yes, I realize that Christmas decorations are out there - they started before Halloween around here! And yes, the retailers are gearing up for Black Friday! Who cares!! What really matters - at least here in the U.S., is that Thanksgiving is rapidly approaching! And that means TURKEY and all the fixin’s!

Yeah, I realize that many of you/us don’t have as much to be thankful for this year - or maybe we do. But, we do have family and friends - and a time to be able to spend with them if we’re fortunate enough to be able to do so over this holiday. It’s a holiday that I really enjoy, with the added bonus of being able to prepare and cook the entire dinner, eat it, and then have plenty of leftovers that will hopefully last a few days! I get to gorge myself with food, and really not care. Loosen the belt a few notches, sleep it off for an hour or so, and start over again!

This is one day when, hopefully, we can forget our troubles for a day. And there are plenty of troubles out there. Tomorrow we get to vote in a local special election regarding an override for Proposition 2 1/2 - which would allow the town to once again arbitrarily raise property taxes - for up to 20 years. I will be voting against the override. It’s a day off from work - I’m grateful, even if I won’t get a paid holiday. It’s a day that I can spend with my wife and two dogs, and not worry about what needs to be done. And trust me, there’s plenty that needs doing around here!

It’s true that we still have men and women overseas fighting on various fronts - we’re grateful for what they are enduring. Many Americans are out of work these days, and we’re sorry to see those numbers rise. But, at least for one day, we can all share what our ancestors thought was very important almost 400 years ago - a day to be thankful for what we have. And that doesn’t mean material possessions!

All of us here at A-ONE want to wish you all a very enjoyable Thanksgiving holiday!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
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Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I'll keep it short and sweet this week, because you may be like me: getting ready for the holiday. I love Turkey. I love Thanksgiving in general. I love the mashed potatoes and the cranberry sauce and the stuffing, but mostly I love turkey.

I don't know about you, but I plan on stuffing myself like a pig until my stomach is sore and I can do little other than lean back and wait for the bloated feeling to pass. I normally have much more self-control, but I love turkey.

We won't be having Thanksgiving at my place this year, and that presents, as Dana has no doubt mentioned already, a problem: No left-overs. Of course, loving turkey as I do, I have a solution. It's called...

SATURDAY!

Yep, I'll be roasting our very own turkey on Saturday. I know that, even though it'll only be two days since Thanksgiving, I'll still find the aroma of roasting bird so enticing that I'll find it hard to sleep. Imagine; the whole house thick with the heady aroma of turkey, browning slowly in the oven while I anticipate and salivate. Did I mention that I love turkey? [grin]

While we're on the subject of turkeys, I want to mention two that come to mind... Sarah Palin and Carrie Prejean.

Now, aside from the fact that they're both very attractive physically (yes, I have no problem with acknowledging that), I find nothing newsworthy about either of them.

Sure, Sarah Palin was a heartbeat away from being a heartbeat away from the Presidency of the United States, and Carrie Prejean was one answer away from being Miss USA... granted, not as prestigious as being a vice-presidential candidate, but still a remarkable feat.

But things have recently gotten rather... interesting with both of them, haven't they? I mean, the OTHER people who were there are denying or refuting Palin's account of the campaign, and little Carrie, who told us that she was pure as the driven snow, has a wild side. It's turned into a she said/he said knock-down drag-out argument with poor little Sarah still feeling put-upon by history, and Carrie feeling put-upon by everyone else.

But there's something these two have in common... other than the fact that both were "beauty queens". They both seem to have a lot of trouble answering questions in a straightforward manner.

Now, before anyone gets their nose bent out of joint, let me say that when Prejean was asked about same-sex marriage, she gave a straight answer. She didn't hesitate, she didn't waiver, she didn't avoid the question. She answered it straight-up. The problem, in my mind was the question itself, or even her answer. The question... and I still wonder about why this question was asked at all in the context of a beauty pageant... excuse me... scholarship program. [chuckle]

The question, just to refresh your memory, was "Do you believe that every

U.S. state should legalize same-sex marriage."

Now, I know next to nothing about Perez Hilton, so I'm not going to speculate about his preconceptions or expectation or, yes, his agenda. But I still don't see how the question is germane to being a beauty queen. [Yeah, I'm going to avoid the obvious jibe about queens]

Miss Prejean's answer, which I thought was quite good, was: "Well I think it's great that Americans are able to choose one way or the other. We live in a land where you can choose same-sex marriage or opposite marriage. And, you know what, in my country, in my family, I think that I believe that marriage should be between a man and a woman, no offense to anybody out there. But that s how I was raised and I believe that it should be between a man and a woman."

Okay, question asked and answered. Or was it? The question wasn't about whether she believed in same-sex marriage, but whether she thought it should be allowed. So she didn't REALLY answer the question.

Let's set our sights on Mrs. Palin for a minute. Oprah asked her the other day if Levi Johnston was going to be invited for Thanksgiving dinner... asked her several times, in fact. The grand duchess of the aerial wolf hunt didn't give a straight answer. She gave some rambling, weasel drivel about him having a beautiful child and being guided and nurtured and all that bunk. It was kind of like Katie Couric asking her what magazines and news papers she read or Charlie Gibson asking her about her stand on the the Bush Doctrine.

Now, I like both Katie Couric and Charlie Gibson, but let's face it; Mike Wallace they ain't. There were no questions asked that couldn't have been prepared for.

On a slightly personal note, Palin's answer to a question about her "foreign policy experience" showed exactly WHY she didn't have any.

To paraphrase, she said something to the effect of, "Well if Russia is going to send nuclear weapons, where are they going to send them from? They're going to come right over us in Alaska, right?"

Ummm, wrong, Sarah-bear. The most likely way for any nuclear warhead fired from Russia toward the United States would be over the Arctic. Yep, as close to buzzing the North Pole as possible. No Alaska necessary. And even if the Russians did, by some quirk of fate, have to "fly over" Alaska to get to the lower 48, how would they do that? Have that puppy fly east until they hit Nome and hang a right? Yeah, this is someone I want dabbling in foreign policy, let alone in NASA policy, which is one of the purviews of the Vice President.

Now back to Miss Prejean. Pure as the driven snow.... well folks, she drifted. [grin]

The thing I find amazing is that even her reasons for lying are lies. "Well yeah, I DID make this little video, but there was only one, and I was 17 at the time"... turns out that both parts of that statement are wrong. But that's nothing new. She had said that she hadn't been.. ummm... augmented physically. Turns out that she had. But, she says, that doesn't really count because the pageant wanted her to have it done. Oh what a tangled web we weave...

So what we've got here, friends and neighbors, are two women who ARE good

at making things up, but not too good at making those things believable. Two women who believe that the really important thing is to get ahead, not to be honest and above-board... unless you're not them.

Yeah, it seems that the more conservative among us (and this could just be my perception, but I don't think so...) always have a good reason that their little rules apply to everyone but themselves. So, yeah, when I start thinking of 'turkeys' I automatically thinking of them.

Before I leave you for this week, I'd just like to put in another pitch for donating food and money to those who need it. Don't think about it, don't wonder what's 'enough' or what's 'too little', just do it. It's been decades since we've seen this kind of need here, and I hope to God it'll be decades more before we see it again, but we ain't through the tough part yet, so c'mon and pitch in whatever you can. Like I said last week, it doesn't have to be a lot. A couple cans of vegetables, a box of rice or bag of sugar or flour or even just a couple of bucks in an envelope for your local soup kitchen or homeless shelter is a really good place to start. It's not about changing someone's life; not all at once, anyway. It's about giving a little bit. A little bit of your good fortune, a little bit of your comfort.. a little bit of yourself. To steal a catch-phrase from Nike, just do it!

And please, please, please, be careful when driving this holiday season. Don't drink and drive... we all know how big a mistake that is. Remember: The life you save may be MINE!

That's about it for this week. Tune in again next time, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - "Assassin's Creed 2" Hits Stores!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Final Fantasy XIII in March!
  Ubisoft's 'Avatar' Security!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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"Assassin's Creed 2" Hits Stores

"Assassin's Creed 2," a new videogame from Ubisoft, hits stores on Tuesday in a hotly anticipated swirl of treachery, swordplay, history, and artistry set in scenic Renaissance Italy.

Analysts expect France-based Ubisoft’s second installment in the "Assassin’s" franchise to be one of the blockbuster releases this holiday season.

"AC2" builds on the original with more options and missions, said Scott Steinberg, lead video game analyst for DigitalTrends.com.

"Assassin’s Creed 2 promises to be one of the most ambitious and atmospheric action-adventures of the holiday season with its slick set pieces," Steinberg told AFP.

"Not only does it offer the proverbial six million ways for targets to die, its unique blend of period-specific swordplay and acrobatics truly allows players to get medieval on their opponents in spectacular fashion."

Players take on the role of nobleman Ezio Auditore Da Firenze, a descendent of the Altair character who starred in the original title.

"Assassin’s Creed was the first game to immerse players in a believable and mature experience inspired by historical events," Ubisoft videogame producer Sebastien Puel told AFP.

"AC2" builds on its predecessor’s winning elements with more gorgeous cityscapes, animations, and 15th century historical settings.

Players will be able to make deals with thieves, mercenaries, or courtesans to act as decoys or accomplices in stealth assassinations.

"Our main focus is to bring diversity and depth to the game play: more variety in missions and objectives, more weapons, more diverse assassinations and a deep character progression," Puel said.

An animated version of Leonardo Da Vinci is Da Firenze’s confidant and close friend in "AC2," providing the assassin with inventions such as a flying machine and a wrist-strapped pistol.

"When we created the Assassin’s Creed franchise we knew we wanted to talk about pivotal periods in history and the historical characters that defined these times," Puel said.

"So when you choose the Italian Renaissance, you immediately think of Leonardo Da Vinci and all of his inventions."

The stage is set in "AC2" when the hero’s family is betrayed and murdered by ruling families of Italy, compelling Da Firenze to learn the ways of his assassin ancestors to obtain revenge.

"To his allies, he will become a force for change -- fighting for freedom and justice," Puel said. "To his enemies, he will become a bogeyman dedicated to the destruction of the tyrants of Italy."

"We really want Assassin’s Creed 2 to be unpredictable and have the player wonder after each main assassination ’And now, what’s next?’" he said.

Puel and his team began work on the sequel when the original "Assassin’s Creed" was released in 2007. The first version sold more than eight million copies.

Ubisoft backed its faith in the convergence of videogames and movies with the creation of "Assassin's Creed: Lineage" short films that tell a story of events setting the stage for the sequel.

"We wanted you to understand where Ezio's hate and quest for revenge come from," Puel said of the Assassin's film trilogy. "We want the player to really hate the bad guys even before they start to play."

The Lineage films from the French videogame titan's Hybride Technologies studio in Canada combine live action and computer generated effects and are viewable at leading video-sharing website YouTube.

Final Fantasy XIII US Release Date Set for March 9

Square Enix says Final Fantasy XIII will hit the US on March 9, 2010, an announcement fulfilling the publisher's promise earlier this week to deliver 'important' news on Friday.

The game will ship with English translation and voiceovers and be available for both PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 owners simultaneously.

Final Fantasy XIII debuts in Japan next month, December 17, and while you'll be able to import and play it through resellers like Play-Asia, it's unlikely to include English subtitles.

The new five-minute trailer accompanying today's announcement features about a minute of slick-suited "Hey, we're Final Fantasy, we change stuff every game!" before handing the mic over to Yoshinori Kitase, the game's producer, who essentially says "High-def makes stuff look real good!"

The new footage starts at about the four-minute mark, but only runs for about 20 seconds. If you're into this series (I am, big time) you'll probably find enough in those 20 to cobble together a message board dissertation. If you're not, you'll probably be as bewildered as usual.

Security Heightened Ahead of Ubisoft's 'Avatar' Game Release

Security cameras in hallways, double locked doors and strict confidentiality clauses, Ubisoft employees are working in a veritable bunker in downtown Montreal to create their latest 3D video game.

"I can't even enter myself without being accompanied," quipped a Ubisoft spokeswoman as she tried to reach the inner sanctum of Ubisoft's third floor offices on Saint-Laurent Boulevard.

Here, some 250 Ubisoft employees are hard at work on a three-dimensional game version of James Cameron's highly-anticipated "Avatar" film.

Cameron has not released a film since his 1997 blockbuster "Titanic," which earned 11 Oscars.

His latest project, a sci-fi opus that reportedly cost a cool 300 million dollars to make, is due out on December 18, marking the debut of

a new 3D process the director of two "Terminators" and "Aliens" has been working on for a decade.

At Ubisoft, the "Avatar" video game development room has been isolated from the rest of the studio and its 2,000 staff, with Pentagon-like controls on entering or leaving.

Inside, a pirate’s flag flapped above the arcade-laboratory littered with empty soft drink cans, superhero action figures and annals of scientific studies on animal mobility.

Most staff focused on their computers trying to work out last minute bugs. One seemed asleep on a sofa while another, game controller in hand, tested one of the game’s three versions.

3D games are not new. Microsoft launched one last year for its Xbox console.

But this new release will be the first on a grand scale, its creators say.

The story unfolds on a magical planet called Pandora. In the heart of an immense tropical forest, strife erupts between an indigenous tribe and an Earth-based intergalactic consortium in search of rare minerals.

Using 3D glasses and a digital television, gamers are given the option of which side to play and meant to feel immersed in the action.

While based on the film, the plot is not a rehash of its storyline. Rather, "Cameron saw the game as an extension of the universe he created," said Patrick Naud, the game’s executive producer.

"It forced us to create new characters, a new mythology and new environments," he told AFP.

The highly detailed work requires a tremendous amount of concentration to, for example, design an animal with six legs that move in a "realistic" way, said Cedric Rang, a section project chief.

The collaboration between Cameron and Ubisoft’s game designers led to some completely new ideas for both the game and film.

"In the film, there are costumes and vehicles and sounds that we had created for the game," noted Patrick Naud, suggesting that joint creative efforts by filmmakers and game designers is where the future lies for both industries.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

FTC Warns Web Sellers of Unproven Flu Products

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission has sent warning letters to 10 Web site operators who have made what the agency called "questionable" claims that products they're selling can prevent, treat or cure the H1N1 flu, often called swine flu.

The FTC, in letters sent last week, told the U.S. Web site operators that unless they have scientific proof to back up their claims, they are violating U.S. law and must drop the claims. The products offered by the Web sites include dietary supplements, air-filtration systems, homeopathic remedies, items containing silver, and cleaning agents, the FTC said in a press release.

The FTC looked for swine flu product claims as part of the International Consumer Protection Enforcement Network's 11th Internet sweep, which took place from Sept. 21 to 25. During the sweep, consumer-protection agencies around the world targeted rapidly growing fraudulent and deceptive conduct on the Internet, with a special emphasis on products or services exploiting financial crises or natural disasters such as the H1N1 pandemic, the FTC said.

In addition to sending warning letters to the 10 Web site operators, the FTC referred 14 other site operators located outside the U.S. to foreign law enforcement officials.

"As consumers grow increasingly anxious about obtaining the H1N1 vaccine for their children and other vulnerable family members, scam artists take advantage by selling them bogus remedies online," David Vladeck, director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, said in a statement.

The FTC will work with other agencies, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, to investigate businesses that promote questionable H1N1 products, the agency said.

The H1N1 virus is thought to spread from person to person in the same way that seasonal flu spreads - mainly through coughing or sneezing by people with the flu. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes.

Public-health officials advise those worried about catching the flu to wash their hands thoroughly and frequently.

Psystar Loses Mac OS X Challenge Against Apple

Apple has won its lawsuit against Psystar, which has been selling Mac OS X in Mac clone computers. The decision in Apple's favor is expected to pave the way for Apple to argue its copyright-infringement case against future violators.

The Cupertino, Calif.-based software maker's claim against Psystar was granted, according to U.S. District Judge William Aslup's decision, and Psystar's anticompetitive claim against Apple was denied.

"I cannot say I'm surprised," said Ilan Barzilay, an associate with Wolf Greenfield, a Boston IP law firm. "Psystar was relying on interpretation of copyright laws that were stretched to begin with. When they were down to their defense, I believed they were close to being cooked."

It is likely Apple will be entitled to attorney fees from Psystar and recover whatever damages Apple can prove, according to Barzilay. "It is likely that they want to just shut Psystar down," he said.

A hearing on what, if anything, Apple will receive in damages will be Dec. 14, according to court filings.

Apple first sued Psystar last year after the company began selling PCs with Mac OS X installed at a fraction of the cost of Apple computers.

Attorneys for Apple argued that the company's end-user licensing agreement forbids third parties from installing Mac OS X on anything other than Apple computers. Aslup agreed, telling Psystar it could not sell Apple software.

The Miami, Fla.-based Psystar then countersued in August 2008, claiming Apple was monopolizing its Mac OS X and wiping out competition, but that suit was dismissed two months later.

While battling with Apple, Psystar last month added more fuel to the fire by offering Rebel EFI software that allows generic PCs to run Mac OS X.

"There are people clamoring for lower-cost computers that will run Apple's software," Barzilay said. But people cannot do that by buying software from companies offering it illegally.

"Someone can go ahead and buy a low-cost PC and buy Apple's Mac OS X, but there is a lot of work doing that and you need top-level skills to do that," Barzilay said. "You can buy the OS separately and if you want to run Apple software, you have to pay for it and buy it from Apple."

While there aren't many people lining up to sell a group of cloned computers, Monday's decision will help discourage people from attempting to do what Psystar did.

"Psystar had a tough road and Apple threw dozens of claims against them and there are still pending claims that in my guess will not ultimately reach trial," Barzilay said. "I think this will be the end for the company."

Time Warner To Spin Off AOL on December 9

Media conglomerate Time Warner Inc said on Monday it will spin off its AOL unit to shareholders on December 9, nine tumultuous years after one of the most disastrous corporate mergers in history.

Time Warner shareholders of record on November 27 will receive an AOL stock dividend for every 11 shares of Time Warner common stock they hold, valuing the company at around $3.5 billion.

AOL common stock will begin trading on a 'when-issued' basis on the New York stock Exchange on November 24 and will start trading under the 'AOL' symbol on December 10.

The company said fractional shares of AOL will not be distributed to

stockholders. Instead, they will be aggregated and sold in the open market, with the net proceeds distributed pro rate in the form of cash payments to Time Warner holders who would otherwise have been entitled to fractional shares.

The AOL spin-off has been structured so shareholders will receive the AOL stock as a tax-free dividend, but cash received in lieu of fractional shares will be taxable.

Time Warner, which owns media brands such as CNN, HBO and Warner Bros, said back in May that it planned to spin off AOL. AOL bought Time Warner in a now much-derided deal in 2001, which was meant to herald the future of content distribution via the Internet.

The promised benefits of the combination were never achieved and Time Warner executives gradually regained control of the business.

AOL Offers Buyouts to Over A Third of Work Force

The struggling Internet company AOL plans to shed up to 2,500 jobs - more than a third of its work force - as it prepares to separate from Time Warner and finally sever their ill-fated marriage.

Major job cuts had been expected and seemed certain after Time Warner said last week that AOL would take $200 million in charges for severance and other restructuring-related costs. But the magnitude was not known until Thursday.

AOL, which has already pared thousands of workers in recent years and now employs about 6,900, is asking for volunteers to accept buyouts. If it falls short of the 2,500 target, it plans layoffs to reach a payroll cut of up to 2,300 positions, a third of its current total.

The cuts will leave AOL at less than a quarter the size it was at its peak in 2004, when it had more than 20,000 employees.

The reductions show the Internet company is endeavoring to become lean as it leaves Time Warner’s side in three weeks. Yet it is still unclear how they will help AOL, which has been trying to reinvent itself as a content and advertising company amid an ongoing decline in its legacy dial-up Internet access business.

The voluntary offer is open to all employees from Dec. 4 through Dec. 11, AOL spokeswoman Tricia Primrose said. The job cuts still need approval from the new AOL board and come on top of about 100 layoffs announced Nov. 10.

"We’re trying to put more choice and decision-making abilities in the hands of the employees, as opposed to having them wait for final cost recommendations or involuntary layoffs," Primrose said.

Frederick Moran, an analyst at The Benchmark Co., said the cuts suggest tough times ahead.

"Obviously companies don’t make such massive layoffs unless their growth prospects are questionable, and that’s the biggest issue overhanging AOL - can it ever see its growth restored after years of deterioration?" he

said.

The layoffs and the impending spinoff cap one of the most disastrous marriages in U.S. corporate history. After being acquired by AOL in 2001, at the height of the dot-com boom, Time Warner said this week it will spin AOL off as a separate company on Dec. 9.

AOL's dial-up Internet access business has been declining for many years, and the company already had shed thousands of jobs as it scaled back to focus more on producing online content to garner advertising revenue.

But AOL had staggered under those efforts, even before the recession drove the advertising market into a slump. It named one of Google Inc.'s advertising chiefs, Tim Armstrong, as chief executive this year to revive the business.

The decision to shed so many workers shows the company is sticking to the strategy laid out by Armstrong earlier this year, Primrose said, which means focusing around AOL's advertising, content, communications and local businesses. Communications includes AOL's AIM instant-messaging service, while local offerings include mapping service MapQuest.

Armstrong will also forgo a bonus this year.

AOL, which is based in New York and has major operations in Northern Virginia, hopes to trim annual costs by about $300 million. It's not known how much AOL now spends on salaries. A regulatory filing said only that "costs of revenues" totaled $2 billion in 2008, while "selling, general and administrative" expenses reached $617 million. Both categories include personnel.

AOL's operations still make money overall, but that profit has been falling. Nonetheless, AOL does have a few bright spots, including popular tech blog Engadget and celebrity Web site TMZ.com. TMZ is a joint venture with another Time Warner unit, Telepictures Productions, and is often credited with being the first to report major developments including Michael Jackson's death.

It is not yet clear what AOL will slash if it doesn't get the number of volunteers it seeks, though.

Some analysts expect cuts to come from the dial-up Internet access business, which currently has about 5.4 million subscribers, down from its peak of 26.7 million subscribers in 2002. AOL already has made many cuts in this area as the dial-up business accounts for less and less of the company's revenue - less than 50 percent last year, compared with nearly 80 percent in 2002.

Others expect AOL may use more freelancers to produce content on its stable of more than 80 free, ad-supported Web sites.

In fact, even as AOL cuts workers, it is planning to greatly expand its content business. The company is expected to launch dozens of new Web sites next year using both full-time employees and freelance workers.

Kevin Lee, CEO of search marketing firm Didit, said AOL's buyout offer might allow the company to reduce severance and unemployment insurance expenses. But he said there's the risk of having to lay off people

anyway, while losing to buyouts some key employees that AOL may not be otherwise cutting.

Obama Speaks Against Internet Censorship, But Is Beijing Listening?

U.S. President Barack Obama on Monday called for a free and open Internet during a town hall meeting with Chinese university students in Shanghai.

"I'm a big believer in technology," the president said. "And I'm a big believer in openness when it comes to the flow of information."

It's doubtful the ruling class in Beijing will pay much attention to Obama's calls for greater Internet freedoms. But the president's words were likely welcomed by the estimated 338 million Internet users in China, and come amid signs that China's infamous Great Firewall of China shows no signs of cracking.

Obama's comments on an open Internet came after a member of the U.S. press corps asked the president if he was familiar with the Great Firewall of China. The reporter also asked whether Obama feels Chinese Internet users should have unrestricted access to Websites like Twitter, which is currently banned in the People's Republic. The president responded by saying he'd never used Twitter, but supports free access to information.

The Chinese government uses its Web censorship system, known as the Great Firewall of China, to restrict access to specific Web sites that Beijing believes are harmful to its interests. Earlier this year, during the 20-year anniversary of the events at Tiananmen Square, Beijing blocked many communications Web sites including Twitter, Hotmail and Flickr. The Global Internet Freedom Consortium has dubbed China's censorship efforts the "Firewall of Shame," and says the country has the most vast and comprehensive system of its kind in the world.

The day before Obama spoke out on Internet censorship, officials from the United Nations were reportedly doing their best to support the Chinese position. On Sunday, Open Net Initiative, an anti-censorship group, held a reception as part of the United Nations-sponsored Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. The reception was interrupted when IGF security officials entered the event and demanded that a poster mentioning the Great Firewall of China be removed. When event organizers refused, the UN officials removed the poster themselves.

The poster in question was advertising a new book called *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rule in Cyberspace*, which was being introduced at the reception/. /One organizer said he planned to file a complaint with the United Nations Human Rights Commission over the dispute.

There is a lot of pressure on President Obama to overhaul the U.S. relationship with China. Amid calls from human rights groups and anti-censorship bodies, the American Chamber of Commerce in China is calling on the president to rein in piracy of American intellectual property in the world's most populous country. For years, pirate copies of American movies, music, and software have been freely available from Chinese street vendors and markets.

But the question remains whether the president can have much effect on a nation that holds trillions of dollars in American debt, and will likely end up financing even more U.S. spending. The New York Times on Sunday equated Obama’s trip to that of a "profligate spender coming to pay his respects to his banker." It will be difficult for the president to raise issues of human rights, censorship, and piracy with China, when he’s hoping for a loan.

Chinese Cyber-Spying Seen Growing Against U.S.

China’s government appears increasingly to be piercing U.S. government and defense industry computer networks to gather useful data for its military, a congressional advisory panel said on Thursday.

"A large body of both circumstantial and forensic evidence strongly indicates Chinese state involvement in such activities," the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission said in its 2009 report to Congress.

The 12-member, bipartisan commission was set up in 2000 to analyze the implications of growing trade with China.

Beijing has begun to broaden its national security concerns beyond a potential clash across the Taiwan Strait and issues around its periphery, the 367-page report said.

China is the most aggressive country conducting espionage against the United States, focused on obtaining data and know-how to help military modernization and economic development, it added.

The amount of "malicious" computer activities against the United States increased in 2008 and is rising sharply this year, it said, adding, "Much of this activity appears to originate in China."

The Chinese Embassy did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The commission said the Chinese government had placed many of its capabilities for computer network operations within elements of the People’s Liberation Army.

"China’s peacetime computer exploitation efforts are primarily focused on intelligence collection against U.S. targets and Chinese dissident groups abroad," it said.

The report cited conclusions of Northrop Grumman Corp, one of the Pentagon’s top contractors, that implicated the Chinese government in extensive cyber activities against the United States.

Omitted was any thorough description of the techniques used for forensic analysis of such suspected cyber espionage.

A Northrop Grumman study was prepared for the commission and released in October. It said Beijing appeared to be conducting "a long-term, sophisticated, computer network exploitation campaign" against the government and U.S. defense industries.

UK Police Make 2 Trojan Computer Virus Arrests

A couple suspected of helping spread some of the Internet's most aggressive computer viruses has been arrested in the English city of Manchester, police said Wednesday.

Scotland Yard's electronic crimes unit said a man and a woman, both 20, were arrested Nov. 3 on suspicion of helping spread malicious Trojan computer programs sometimes known as "Zbot" or "ZeuS."

Police said the viruses are thought to have infected tens of thousands of computers worldwide, and one technology consultant described them as the "most notorious pieces of malware of recent times."

"This is one of the most frequent families of worms that we encounter," said Graham Cluley, a technology consultant with the U.K. security firm Sophos PLC. "The ferocity with which it's been spammed out on occasions has really hit our radar."

Cluley said the Zbot family of viruses first came to his attention in 2007. Since then it has periodically swept across the Internet, stealing personal information from computers across the world and feeding it back to cyber-criminals. The viruses are commonly known as Trojans because they sneak onto computers and attack it from the inside, harvesting millions of lines of data - including banking information, credit card numbers and social networking passwords.

The viruses spread by sending e-mails or other messages from infected computers, impersonating banks, tax officials, credit card companies or even friends and enticing potential victims to click on a link.

Police said given the amount of information stolen "the potential financial gains to the culprits and losses to individuals and institutions are very substantial."

Cluley said it was impossible to know just how much money had been lost to the viruses, adding that attacks were ongoing - including two in the past week alone.

It is not clear exactly what role the Manchester pair are suspected of playing in the viruses' spread. Scotland Yard says the two have since been released on bail and declined to elaborate on their investigation.

Suspects in Britain are rarely identified unless they've been charged.

Google Says PC Will Start in Seven Seconds or Less

New Google Inc software will start up a computer as fast as a television can be turned on, the search company said on Thursday as it showed off its Chrome operating system designed for PCs that do their work on the Web.

Google gave the first public look at its Chrome OS four months after declaring its intention of developing the PC's main software, a move that pits it directly against Microsoft Corp and Apple Inc.

True to Google’s Internet-pedigree, the Chrome OS resembles a Web browser more than it does a traditional computer operating system like Microsoft Windows, matching Google’s ambition to drive people to the Web - where they can see Google ads.

Google said the software will initially be available by the holiday season of 2010 on low-cost netbooks that meet Google’s hardware specifications, such as using only memory chips to store data instead of slower hard drives, the current standard.

Netbooks running Chrome OS will only be able to run Web applications and the user’s data will automatically be stored on the Web in the so-called cloud of Internet servers, Google executives said at an event at the company’s Mountain View, California headquarters on Thursday.

"It’s basically a Web browsing machine," said Altimeter Group analyst Charlene Li, referring to the netbooks powered by Chrome OS.

Such a machine is made for a world of near-constant, extremely fast Web connection, without the type of software that made Microsoft famous, since most of the work would be done by big machines on the Web which take directions and send information to relatively uncomplicated devices like a Chrome PC.

Sundar Pichai, vice-president of product management for Google’s Chrome OS, said that computers running Chrome OS will be able to start in less than seven seconds.

"From the time you press boot you want it to be like a TV: You turn it on and you should be on the Web using your applications," Pichai said.

Google said it is giving away the software for free, similar to its Android smartphone software, with the idea that improving the Web experience will ultimately benefit its Internet search advertising business, which generated roughly $22 billion in revenue in 2008.

"They’re doing it to get further and further entrenched in whatever people are doing to go online, whether that’s a browser, an operating system or in applications," said Todd Greenwald, an analyst with Signal Hill Group.

"If Chrome is the OS then the attach (access) rate on Google searches will be a lot higher," he said.

But analysts noted that the differences between conventional PCs and Chrome OS netbooks might give some consumers pause.

"If they view it from the conventional perspective, then it falls short," Gartner analyst Ray Valdes said of Chrome OS, citing its lack of compatibility with traditional software and its limited offline capabilities.

Google officials said Chrome OS netbooks will be able to provide some functions when offline, but that the product was primarily designed to be connected to the Internet.

But Valdes said if Google can deliver on the products’ promises, such as fast performance, then consumers may view Chrome OS netbooks as distinct class of products with attractive benefits.

"I think that it’s initially going to appeal to small subset of the general consumer population," said Valdes. "The question is can they build on that and expand that over time."

Google made the computer code for the Chrome OS available to outside developers on Thursday, allowing developers to tinker with the software and potentially design new applications to run alongside it.

With Chrome, Google is seeking to challenge the dominance of Microsoft Corp’s Windows, which runs on nine out of 10 personal computers.

The Chrome OS also challenges makers of traditional, desktop software, including Microsoft and its lucrative Office suite of productivity software, since Chrome OS only runs Web applications.

Google’s Pichai, noted during a demonstration on Thursday, that Chrome OS-based PCs would be interoperable with Web-based versions of software, such as Microsoft’s online version of its Excel spreadsheet.

Google said all data in Chrome will automatically be housed in the so-called cloud, or on external servers, but also cached on the computer’s internal hardware to boost performance.

If a person loses their netbook, Google Engineering Director Matt Papakipos explained, they can buy a new one, log in and within seconds have a machine with access to all the same data as their previous device.

"What really makes this a cloud device is that all the user data is synced back to the cloud in real time," said Papakipos.

Microsoft Provides Early Look at Internet Explorer 9

Microsoft on Wednesday showed off early work on Internet Explorer 9, a browser that will feature improved performance, new features, and the possibility of new standards.

Stephen Sinofsky, president of the newly renamed Windows and Windows Live division, took the stage at the company’s Professional Developer’s Conference (PDC), and said the company was looking at new standards like HTML 5, and noted how far behind IE is on the current ACID test, a test designed to expose browser flaws.

Microsoft has only been working on IE9 for about three weeks, so an actual release is not expected in the near future. But the new browser has already moved from a 20 to 32 on the Acid 2 test, though, this is, of course, not released code.

Sinofsky stressed how different sites and applications used different features. However, he displayed a chart showing how much faster IE9 is on Webkit.org’s SunSpider performance test. It appeared to be very close to the current betas of the other browsers. Microsoft is also working on the Acid tests for compatibility, he said.

Other new features on display included hardware acceleration using Direct Write and Direct 2D for text support. This should improve the appearance of fonts and performance of text animation without requiring

changes to the sites themselves. One particularly impressive rendering showed Bing Maps displaying a map at about 13-14 frames per second. Using hardware acceleration, it was running at 60 frames per second.

PogoPlug Upgrade Powers Up More Drives

We liked the original Pogoplug - a devices that would make any storage device instantly Web accessible - enough to give it 4 stars and name it an Editors' Choice. The new version, announced today, improves on the design of the original (assuming you like purple) and adds options to share a lot more data from a lot more drives.

In general, Pogoplug lets you access, share, and stream any media content to the Internet, either for your own remote access or for others. The data never leaves your personal hard drives, but is easy to get access via the online interface designed by Cloud Engines, the company behind the device. The software will synch with your photos, videos, and music folders so you can always find them online later. You can create a slideshow using all of the above via drag and drop.

Now, instead of connecting just one USB drive (hard drive or portable flash drive), you can connect up to four - there are three ports in back, and one in front. A Gigabit Ethernet port in back hooks the Pogoplug to your network. Instead of just being a white brick, the new Pogoplug integrates a stand with cable holder.

Pogoplug has no problem searching across multiple drives; in fact, you can hook multiple Pogoplugs to a single account, or use a USB hub to connect more than one drives to a port, so it could be searching a lot more than four storage devices.

The new Pogoplug won't ship until the end of 2009, but you can pre-order. The price is $129 and that includes the account, there's no additional fees after that. It's $30 dollars more than the original, but seems to have added enough extras to be worth it.

New Pogoplug 'Personal Cloud' Does Social Networking

On Friday, Cloud Engines released its newest version of the Pogoplug, a small "multimedia sharing device" that connects hard drives to the Internet and allows a user to access the files remotely. The company described Pogoplug as "your own personal cloud that broadcasts safely from your home."

You connect Pogoplug to your router by Ethernet, attach hard drives or USB flash drives, and then access files by logging in from anywhere through a browser. You can also securely give access to others for downloading or uploading, the company said.

The shared content can be searched remotely by file type or other parameters and, with a downloadable desktop application, the drives can work as if they were local to whatever machine you happen to be on. Mobile-compatible devices include iPhone, BlackBerry and Android-based phones.

The newest Pogoplug offers multiple USB ports for as many as four external drives, a drag-and-drop interface to create slide and audio shows, and capabilities for sharing with friends on social-networking sites.

Essentially, Pogoplug is a gateway to deliver your content to yourself or others from a home or office through the Internet. Cloud Engines CEO Daniel Putterman said the company is "giving our customers the best way to access their data from anywhere in the world."

The newest incarnation of this product enables Pogoplug to sync with a Mac or PC, so content can be automatically imported from iTunes, Windows Media Player, or iPhoto. With this "set it and forget it" feature, users can access new photos, videos or music remotely.

The new model also allows creating a slideshow of photos, videos and music, and then sharing the show via a link. There's an address book to share e-mail addresses, and global search across multiple Pogoplugs and drives. Videos can be played back directly from Pogoplug.

Ross Rubin, director of industry analysis for consumer technology at the NPD Group, described Pogoplug as "one of the few products to share media with others outside of the home." He noted that it's a network-attached storage device for consumers. A NAS is a network-connected device whose sole purpose is to provide file storage for the network, a kind of stripped-down file server.

With Pogoplug, hard drives or USB flash drives can have a more prominent role without going through a computer. Similarly, other kinds of peripherals are also finding an independent life without requiring a computer.

For instance, Hewlett-Packard's DreamScreen can pull relevant content and information from the Web, connect to Facebook, and present photos, music or video. Some HP printers are stand-alone, multi-featured devices that can print web-based content without a computer. And ASUS' Eee Keyboard is a full computer with Wi-Fi and a five-inch touchscreen.

Egypt Applies First for International Web Domain

The agency in charge of assigning domain names today began accepting applications for domain names written in non-Latin languages, and Egypt - a country now drawing heated criticism from human rights advocates - became the first to apply for a domain name in Arabic.

Following a controversial decision by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) to allow Web sites written in Arabic, Russian Chinese, and other non-ASCII character sets, governments or their designees can now apply for the approval of such names.

Egypt has applied for an Arabic Internet domain name with a suffix equating in the ASCII character set to "masr," meaning Egypt in the Arabic language.

The move to expand domain names to non-Latin languages has been heralded as a way to open up the Web for easier access by the billions of people in

the world who speak those languages.

"The first countries that participate will not only be providing valuable information of the operation of IDNs in the domain system, they are also going to help to bring the first of billions more people online - people who never use Roman characters in their daily lives," ICANN CEO and President Rod Beckstrom said in a recent statement.

On the other hand, ICANN's measure has been criticized as making it harder for people without the right keyboards or other technologies in place to access international Web sites.

Now, another potential controversy could be stirring, because the United Nations' Internet Governance Forum (IGF) decided to gather in Egypt for this week's annual meeting, drawing highly publicized objections from a press freedom organization.

The organization Reporters without Borders has described the IGF's choice of Egypt as "astonishing" in light of Egypt's human rights record.

Criticism of Egypt from the group at a time when Egypt is also applying for a domain name with ICANN does tend to shine a spotlight on human rights abuses in that country.

Some might wonder whether countries with dubious human rights records ought to be permitted to set up domain names that are difficult for people outside those countries to access.

But the fact of the matter is that Web sites have long been written in non-Latin languages, despite the character sets used in their domain names.

Meanwhile, Web sites in some countries - notably China - are already using non-ASCII suffixes, anyway, without an official nod of approval from ICANN.

Like it or not, the Internet has long been a multilingual place. Communications are all but invisible to those who don't speak the languages in which a Web site is written, regardless of the domain suffix.

It might be easier for English-speakers to get to a Web site that uses a domain name consisting of ASCII characters. Yet that doesn't mean one can understand what people are saying on the site. Internet translation engines can be a big help, but their accuracy is hardly guaranteed.

Meanwhile, national governments - even those without good human rights records - have long had at least some say into how their citizens use - or don't use - the Internet, which citizens can access it, and for what purposes (again, see China).

ICANN's nod in the direction of more open access is a nice gesture, but it won't really turn the Internet into any more (or less) of a happy and humane global village.

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